

Transnational Solidarity: The EU as Republic of Equals?

Juri Viehoff (juri.viehoff@eui.eu)

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Note to reader: *This is a chapter from a (soon to be finished, I hope) book manuscript on equality and social justice in the European Union. Though the chapter departs from some assumptions about the theoretical and empirical nexus between solidarity and economic justice (an earlier chapter of the book), as well as a distinctive understanding of solidarity as captured by ideals of social equality (more fully developed elsewhere, but briefly mentioned in section 2), I feel that the argument is free standing and easily to follow as is. In any event, my talk will not rely on these other parts of the manuscript.*

Introduction

The last two chapters advanced direct transnational arguments for substantive economic justice at the EU level by, first, making the positive case that some of the reasons for equality-inclined principles of income and wealth as well as fair equality of opportunity are required at the EU level, and, second dispelling the argument that the EU does not require substantive justice because it is a voluntary association amongst states. In this chapter, I turn to the second category of arguments that support the claim that principles of egalitarian economic justice apply to the EU, namely those that I have called *indirect* transnational arguments. Recall that the idea here was that some institutional requirements do not derive directly from considerations of fairness that bear on basic institutions, but derive from the fact that such institutions should enable and foster certain kinds of relationships, namely relationships of equality and solidarity, amongst those subject to them. As far as the transnational version of such an argument is concerned, we can summarize its main steps as follows:

- (1) Social equality/solidarity¹ amongst all EU citizens is a valuable and feasible political ideal
- (2) Reducing EU-wide economic inequality is one essential component in any successful strategy to realise ‘EU social equality’/solidarity
- (3) Reducing economic inequality amongst EU citizens requires us to implement substantive principles of economic justice at the EU level

Thus, implementing substantive principles of economic justice or a strong ‘Social Europe’ is required in order to realise the valuable ideal of egalitarian transnational solidarity amongst EU citizens. The aim of sections four and five in chapter two was to render plausible the general logic underpinning premises (2) and (3) in an institutional context, i.e. to explain why social equality and solidarity demand particular institutional conditions that include the economic

¹ NOTE: Throughout this chapter I use the notion of ‘transnational solidarity’ and ‘EU social equality’ interchangeably. I argue for the claim that if solidarity is interestingly distinct from mere claims of distributive justice, then it must be conceived in terms of the value of egalitarian social relationships in chapter 2 of the book.

organisation of society in-line with relatively modest material inequality and a social minimum. However, if this argument is to do any work in the context of the EU, what I have yet to do is to show that premise (1), the idea that such a form of solidarity is a valuable and feasible political ideal amongst persons who do not live together on the traditional terms of citizenship within a nation state, is a plausible claim. Vindicating premise (1) is the task of this chapter. I do so in four steps: In the next section (section 2), I develop a more detailed preliminary answer to the question when and why we have reasons to value social equality. Subsequently, I introduce a number of ‘restrictivist’ arguments that have been put forward in the context of philosophical discussion about global politics, that is, arguments that seek to undermine a concern with social or relational equality at a global level. These arguments come in two varieties, namely (a) those that put into question whether social solidarity is possible or feasible beyond the confines of the nation state, and (b) arguments that question the moral relevance of rendering transnational relationships more egalitarian (in-line with the ideal of solidarity requires). In the fourth section, I develop a number of general responses to these restrictivist arguments. Finally, in section five, I show why the EU context in particular gives rise to justified demands for egalitarian transnational solidarity. Section six concludes.

6.2 When and why does social equality matter?

To develop a considered view about whether or not the ideal of social equality may have purchase amongst EU citizens considered as a group, we need first to gain a more general idea of when the ideal of social equality may be either possible or desirable to characterise the interaction of human groups, that is, we need to understand ‘when’ and ‘why’ social equality may be valuable. Let me turn first to the ‘when’ question, which I think can be more easily answered by reflecting about other contexts in which relational equality matters. If we think about personal relationships, it seems obvious that we attach more urgency to the realisation of relational equality in those contexts where the relationship has a significant impact on the wellbeing of those participating in it. Thus, we feel that it is more important to conduct marriages and life-partnerships on an egalitarian footing than it is to conduct voluntary membership in clubs and associations on the basis of equality. There are no reasons to think that similar considerations do not apply when we move from personal relationships to larger sets of persons who interact with each other. It seems to me then that we can approximate the urgency of conducting relationships amongst larger sets of persons as equals by reference to three criteria, namely (a) the depth or intensity of their interaction, (b) the expected permanency of their social engagement, and (c) the reasonable unavailability of the involvement.

Let us consider these in turn by looking at the example of the relations amongst permanent citizens of a state: The first aspect, depth and intensity, essentially measures how dependent persons are on one another to satisfy their preferences and needs, broadly conceived.

This concerns not merely their degree of economic interaction for the satisfaction of material wellbeing, but also the question of how encompassing their social relationships are across different spheres of social esteem and recognition, i.e. those elements that are essential for individuals to build and sustain a secure sense of their own worth (e.g. Rawlsian self-respect). Now in the context of a closed (idealized) nation state the depth and intensity of interaction amongst the set of persons subject to it is quite encompassing. People share the economic and political institutions that comprehensively shape their material wellbeing and, moreover, they interact in the state's public sphere across various social spheres, thereby developing self-respect (or not).

The second aspect, permanency, is a precondition for social relationships to develop: only where there are patterns of interaction and expectations about future behaviour and communal practices can we ask meaningful questions about what values should characterise relationships when these are not conducted on the basis of actual personal interaction. One-off encounters amongst nomads at an oasis may give rise to questions of distributive fairness, but this seems to track moral concerns quite distinct from the thick web of reciprocal expectations that we consider the subject of equality in relationships.² The measure is clearly one of degree: Social equality may well become a moral goal amongst a group of students thrown together in a remote location for a six-week summer camp. But the urgency of realising it there seems pale by comparison to citizens living together on permanent terms in a state. The final aspect, unavoidability points to the fact that we believe that specific justificatory requirements apply where people cannot reasonably exempt themselves from social interaction. Aside from whether or not persons can exit social arrangements without incurring costs that would make it unreasonable to do so, one important indicator of unavoidability is the degree to which interaction is grounded in public social norms and institutions because these both entrench and amplify social distinctions: no single person can change such norms unilaterally, and all participants to social interaction recognise differences in social status independent of whether or not they have engaged with a specific person on an individual basis before.

Why is social equality valuable? Even if I have pointed out in the last paragraphs what factors in the interaction amongst a large group of persons may increase our sense of urgency that their relations should be relations amongst equals, some will insist that I have not answered the more basic question, namely what reasons we have in the first place to realise social equality. The thought is that only once we have understood the goals that are being served by realising the ideal in the context of domestic society can we assess whether those goals are similarly served when we introduce social equality amongst persons who share supranational political institutions in the EU or globally.

² For a discussion of this point, see (Kolodny 2014: 293).

Again, I think we can best approach this fundamental question by looking at the reasons we might have for considering social equality valuable in the context of domestic society. It strikes me that there are two kinds of responses we can offer, which we might call respectively a 'holistic' and a 'disaggregative' answer. One 'holistic' response is formulated by Miller who suggests that we value a community characterised by social equality because "it aspires to be a society in which people deal with one another simply as individuals, taking account only of personal capacities, needs, achievements, etc., without the blocking effect of status differences."³ This suggestion invites the question *why* we should aspire to live in a society in which people relate to one another 'simply as individuals'. What value is better realised in such a society? One initial response may be that such a society is a fairer society: it would be unfair if people had higher social recognition for reasons other than their personal capacities and achievements. However, fairness considerations seem to explain only part of our reasons for wanting to leave in a society of equals. A society scrupulously governed by considerations of fairness may still give rise to differences in status that are deserved because of differences in merit, achievement and the responsible or irresponsible exercise of individual choice. And we may regret this loss of equal status even if it does not constitute unfairness to those now considered inferior.⁴ So whilst Miller's 'holistic' description of social equality is accurate, it seems to me that once we are pressed to justify it, we will eventually resort to the conclusion that people should relate to each other in those ways *because they are equals*, in which case we would have to admit that the original claim that we are attempting to defend (that social equality is valuable) has equal or even stronger appeal than any argument we might offer in its favour. In this sense, relational equality, and social equality as its expression in the context of political relationships, has a kind of rock-bottomness to it that makes it a genuinely egalitarian vision of (political) life: we cannot explain our conviction by recourse to other moral values that may be served by its realisation.⁵

A more 'disaggregative' account of why social equality is valuable distinguishes between the different components and consequences of a society organised in accordance with the requirements of social equality and points out the value that each of these has for individuals within that society. Although I think that both accounts of why social equality is valuable are essential to understand the ideal, it strikes me that disaggregating the components of social equality in the domestic case may prove more useful in relation to the question that concerns us

³ (Miller 1995a: 207-208) (Miller 1995: 207-208).

⁴ Cases of this kind are discussed in both (Scanlon 2005: 214) and (Miller 1995a: 204). See also Walzer's comments about how an inegalitarian society could arise when "the same people were successful in one sphere after another, triumphant in every company, piling up goods without the need for illegitimate conversion (...)" (1983: 20). This would certainly make for an inegalitarian society (...).

⁵ The upshot of this would be that wherever relational equality could be realised, we have *some* reason to attempt to govern our relationships on egalitarian terms. But of course this does not mean that we have conclusive reason to globally extend the ideal of social equality: equality might conflict with other important values. Even if something valuable is lost when we fail to realize it, the cost of doing so in other respects might simply be too high.

here, namely which of the reasons we have to value social equality may be transferable beyond domestic society. This strategy is pursued for example by Martin O’Neill, who suggests that we can to some extent distinguish those individual components of social equality that “together constitute a complex background picture of how people should live together as equals.”⁶ In chapter two, I explained that three distinct inegalitarian bads are relevant when we think about how the ideal of social equality affects the way in which we should design our social institutions (the issues of social justice and legitimacy). These were, first, the badness of unequal power, which gives some people a level of control over social life and its institutions that is inconsistent with all persons living together as equals. Second, the badness of stigma and humiliation which causes some members of society to lack the basal status as contributors with equal standing in public deliberation and decision-making and, third, the badness that occurs when ‘complex equality’ between spheres of social recognition (in the sense of esteem) breaks down and hierarchies of status come to govern the relations amongst members.⁷ Realising the full ideal of social equality at the least requires the absence of all of these inegalitarian bads, because each of them poses a particular harm to those who live together on permanent terms. However, having disaggregated these components of social equality, we can now also ask which of these specific inegalitarian bads might occur in which specific contexts beyond the state, and so we should be able to gain a better understanding of which aspects of social equality may be reasonably extended to these contexts, even if not all of them may turn out to be realistically implementable. Thus, the more nuanced set of questions that we need to ask in relation to the issue of social equality’s value and feasibility beyond the state is this: First, which of our reasons in support of domestic social equality translate directly to transnational political contexts? Second, which of the strategies we identified domestically to counteract the evil of social inequality are likely to be available when we move beyond the state? It is in regard of these questions that I now compare the case of the EU and the global sphere.

6.3 Arguments that restrict the scope of transnational solidarity

Similar to my discussion of direct transnational arguments in chapter four, I want to begin the discussion of whether or not the ideal of social equality can plausibly be extended to the EU by presenting some ‘restrictivist’ arguments that have been advanced to demonstrate that extending this ideal *globally* is either impossible because there is no conceivable way of removing the kinds of status inequalities that presently prevail (call these *infeasibility arguments*) or, alternatively, that realising the ideal globally is not morally required (call these *moral arguments*). The feasibility

⁶ (O’Neill 2008: 125)

⁷ These individual components also track closely O’Neill’s account according to which a society of equals guarantees against (i) stigmatizing differences in status, (ii) problematic relations of unequal power and domination (iii) inadequate levels of self-respect, and (iv) “servility and deferential behaviour” that (v) “undermines healthy fraternal relations.” (O’Neill 2008: 126)

argument maintains that some or all of the relational and institutional facts that need to obtain for social equality to be realistically realisable do not and possibly cannot exist amongst persons globally. The moral argument that I discuss here comes in two versions: A more radical version is that questions of social equality simply do not arise in ways similar to the domestic case because social equality is strictly confined to the relationship of equal citizenship. In other words, nothing of value is sacrificed where social equality beyond the state is not realised. A slightly more conciliatory restrictivist argument suggests that the most important moral reasons that underpin the case for social equality domestically do not arise in transnational contexts. According to this argument then, something akin to social equality might be morally desirable amongst non-co-citizens, but since realising it is much less important than it is in domestic contexts, our reasons for introducing it are outweighed by other concerns. Although restrictivist arguments about social equality are correct in pointing out that realising the ideal of social equality might be more easily implementable in those cases where equal citizenship in a state is already present, and although there are certain considerations that point to the conclusion that the absence of social equality is especially harmful amongst persons sharing the full panoply of social interaction amongst co-citizens, any attempt to *categorically* limit the scope of social equality to the context of citizenship is misconceived.

6.3.1 Moral arguments against transnational solidarity

6.3.1.1 Membership argument

The first argument against extending the ideal of social equality beyond particular states or societies is an argument about membership: Social equality is a particular form of relational equality, which is, as the name suggests, an ideal about how particular kinds of concrete human relationships should be conducted. For example, the ideal of spousal equality points to the fact that relations amongst spouses will have an additional dimension of value when they are conducted as relations amongst equal life-partners. Notice the conditional element of the formulation just given: *if* the particular kind of relationship exist, then it will have additional value when conducted as one amongst equals. Now it would obviously be a mistake to infer from the formulation just given that *because* there is value when spouses relate to one another as equals, people should get married. Much else would need to be argued to draw that conclusion.

Using this kind of example as an analogy, the membership argument maintains that social equality is the particular kind of relational equality that gives additional value to the specific relations that exist amongst co-citizens. Thus, the various aspects and requirements in the domain of social justice that stem from considerations of social equality discussed in chapter two should be seen as conditional upon the pre-existence of citizenship: in the same way in which you have no specific moral requirements of spousal equality towards me unless we are married, there are no specific requirements stemming from social equality unless we already share the

equal basic status of citizenship. To determine what it takes to be one another's equals in the kind of relationships that exist beyond the confines of citizenship, e.g. amongst those living in the EU, we will need a completely separate account, and there is no straightforward way to derive any egalitarian requirements of that particular relationship from social equality amongst citizens.

6.3.1.2 *Non-comparing group argument*

A second social equality-restricting moral argument is based on a more empirical observation. The argument is presented by David Miller, who adopts it from an argument John Rawls made in the domestic context of 'excusable envy' amongst the worse off.⁸ The argument is the following: as a matter of sociological fact, people will organise themselves into groups of roughly equal social position. Where this occurs, in-group comparisons become a much more significant factor in a person's development of self-respect than comparisons across social groups do. It is through this mechanism of non-comparing groups, Rawls thinks, that the understandable disposition to feel envy towards those with more primary social goods and therefore to suffer a loss of self-respect can be contained in domestic society, because "these features of a well-ordered regime diminish the number of occasions when the less favoured are likely to experience their situation as impoverished and humiliating."⁹ Miller links this argument to the question of cross-national comparison and maintains, quite plausibly, that the tendency towards cross-group comparisons and hence for the development of envy and loss of self-respect amongst members of groups that are worse-off is even less likely to occur across individuals who do not share a state and thick cultural values.¹⁰ As a result, we have much less reason to be concerned with the differences across national groups; even where people do compare their position to those of others in different states, they are far less likely to feel the kind of humiliation, worthlessness and inferiority that Rawls describes as the consequences of unfavourable comparisons with others who are better off within a person's group of reference.

6.3.2 Feasibility arguments

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, unequal social status arises from widespread assumptions of social hierarchy, and hierarchy presupposes some form of habitual interaction and the formation of at least some common expectations about worth, status, recognition and so forth.¹¹ Whilst this first point may demonstrate that social equality is unrealisable with those residing in communities that are disconnected from global communication networks and the global economy (e.g. some indigenous peoples and possibly extreme cases like North Korea), it

⁸ (Miller 2007: 78)

⁹ (Rawls 1999c: 471)

¹⁰ (Rawls 1999c: 470), (Miller 2007: 78)

¹¹ Some writers use the metaphor that for social equality to be a meaningful ideal, persons must "share a social world", e.g. (Christiano 2008a).

does not yet say anything specific about whether social equality in cases like the EU might be possible. Thus, for feasibility arguments to present interesting objections against social equality beyond the state at the current stage of globalisation, we need to get one step closer to the specific requirements of that ideal. We do so by distinguishing the empirical requirements that need to be in place for each of the different inegalitarian bads to be possible to arise.

The ideal of social equality requires the absence of different forms of hierarchy. Amongst those mentioned were the absence of hierarchies of power, basic standing, and social status, where this notion was understood as a situation where no group categorically outranks all other groups in terms of various spheres of social esteem (this was the specific interpretation of ‘complex equality’ I offered). Now the more interesting feasibility arguments against extending social equality claim that at least some of the various aspects that together constitute social equality cannot realistically be introduced between persons who are members of separate states. Since different arguments will attack different kinds of hierarchies that need to be absent for social equality to arise, we can look at these arguments in turn.

Equal basic standing. One first argument notices the indisputable fact of cultural, social and economic diversity that we find globally and insists that it is impossible to define a measure of what it would take for individuals to be considered worthy of basic respect or basic standing across different cultures and societies. Recall that this was the egalitarian requirement that no person should reasonably feel humiliated or stigmatized when relating to others in public. To consider just one piece of evidence that supports this argument, think about the massive differences in terms of material possessions one needs to have to be considered a respectable person in the UK compared to those resources required in places like Niger or Malawi. What this suggests is that there is no such thing as standard of “freedom from humiliation” that we can specify across specific social and cultural contexts. A second point here is the following: Stigma and humiliation, although genuine harms that people can suffer, are social phenomena that presuppose actual personal interaction and social contact amongst those stigmatised and those enjoying a superior standing. Where there is no public sphere of interaction governed by a determinate set of social norms of respectability, the kind of humiliation or shame that egalitarians oppose in human relations simply do not and cannot arise.¹²

Equal power. In relation to hierarchies of power, we saw that social equality requires that citizens have equal power over those norms and institutions that are constitutive of their relationship as citizens. Whilst it may be very difficult to bring about equal power relations amongst persons residing in different states because powerful individuals and states lack the will to bring this about, this is not yet by itself a clear argument for infeasibility.¹³ Rather, the

¹² See e.g. Miller: “Equality of status is important among people who are in daily contact with one another, and who share a common way of life.” (Miller 2007: 77).

¹³ To be more precise, I mean by feasibility arguments here arguments that question our ability to understand what realizing the ideal of social equality would mean in transnational contexts. Arguments stemming from

infeasibility argument in relation to the requirement of equal power is the following: The absence of hierarchy in power obtains when we each exercise equal power over those decisions that fall within the scope of the relevant relationship. Thus, relational equality amongst friends requires equal power as far as decisions within the context of our friendship are concerned. This may include questions about how to spend time together, what to expect from one another in terms of material support in difficult circumstances, and so forth. As far as citizenship is concerned, equal power relates to those political and institutional questions that concern citizens together *as citizens*. It obviously does not extend to equal power over how each person conducts his or her private life so long as she individually respects the legal rules over which citizens have equal power. Now the feasibility objection in relation to transnational relationships is that we lack a clear concept of what the kinds of decisions are in respect of which we should have equal power as far as our ‘relationship’ is concerned. Does the ideal of ‘global social equality’ require that we all have equal power over all (political) decisions? Or merely over those (political) decisions that affect us all? Or merely those (political) decisions that affect us all equally?¹⁴

Equal status. The third and final objection concerns the notion of equal status, which was linked in previous chapters to the idea of complex equality across different spheres of esteem whose incommensurability meant that people in their interaction would only rely on their status as citizens with equal rights. One first feasibility objection against extending this idea of such a ‘parity of esteem’ across national borders again draws on cultural difference. The claim is that there are certain sociological requirements for complex equality to be feasible, namely that persons must have certain forms of culturally shared understanding regarding (a) the spheres of esteem that matter in the construction of social status, (b) the criteria of ranking internal to spheres of esteem, and (c) that they must have to some extent overlapping beliefs about outranking in which spheres is sufficient to constitute overall superiority (and thus lead to unequal status). A second argument about feasibility in relation to equal status is this: The logic of the complex equality argument is that different spheres of esteem are incommensurable and that therefore the only form of ‘ranking’ on which people can rely in their public interaction is their common political status of equal citizenship. But there is no such ‘fall-back’ status globally, and it is difficult to imagine what that status could be other than citizenship. So unless those favouring social equality beyond the state actually mean to introduce a global state with equal global citizenship, there is no conceivable way of realising equal status (in the sense required by complex equality) amongst persons beyond the state. As a result, transnational equal status, even

people’s lack of motivation to do what they ought to do –which could also be considered constraints on feasibility- I do not consider here.

¹⁴ The objection here resembles a prominent argument against global democracy according to which global politics lacks one crucial condition that permits domestic democratic decision-making to embody equal respect for each participant, namely the condition that each person has roughly equal stakes in the decisions that are being reached. (Christiano 2006, 2009)

if it is conceivably of value, is not realisable so long as individuals remain citizens of separate states.

6.4 Assessing the equality-restricting arguments

6.4.1.1 Membership

I begin with the membership argument explained in the last section, which insisted that citizenship is a clear pre-requisite for social equality to arise as a moral concern, and that social equality in the domestic context provides no guidance to relational equality amongst those subject to political institutions beyond the state. This simple argument from membership is unpersuasive. First, as my discussion in the previous chapters sought to establish, there are in fact common features that we see in relationships of various kinds when they realise relational equality, namely the basic conditions of equal power and equal standing/recognition. Thus, it would be misleading to suggest that an account of what it takes to relate to others who are subject to political institutions at the EU level as equals will be radically disconnected from the ideal of social equality I have described in relation to domestic society: at least some aspects will be analogous or even identical. Second, consider the pervasive implications that would follow if existing *official* membership rules would be the condition for the moral concern of social equality to arise. As Rekha Nath points out, it would follow from this assumption that people who are unjustly denied equal membership as citizens within states (e.g. women prior to universal suffrage, ante bellum Afro-Americans etc.) had no claim to be considered as social equals, simply because these further claims are somehow only morally important once there is equal citizenship.¹⁵

To escape this unpalatable conclusion and to have the argumentative resources to criticize unjust exclusion from citizenship, those linking social equality to the pre-existence of citizenship must provide some account why people who live in proximity and interact in specific ways should have common citizenship characterised by equal rights to begin with. But once they offer such an account, say in the form of conditions x,y,z that render co-citizenship morally necessary, it seems reasonable to ask whether some of the consequences that flow from equal citizenship on their account, for example the requirement of social equality, might not also be morally desirable where some but perhaps not all of the conditions that speak in favour of equal citizenship are present but equal citizenship is not (yet) realised. Those seeking to restrict social equality to persons who already share equal citizenship might then insist that in spite of conditions that favour equal citizenship, the realisation of social equality is *impossible* unless there is a basis of political equality, and, as it turns out, the only such basis that we know of is equal citizenship. This however would be a quite different argument, namely the one about feasibility absent equal basic rights discussed at the end of the last section.

¹⁵ (Nath 2011: 609-610)

6.4.1.2 Non-comparing groups

The non-comparing group argument maintained that social equality is not a concern beyond the state because people are less likely to compare themselves and their material circumstances with those living abroad, and even where they do so, the effect of such comparisons is unlikely to have similarly damaging effects for their sense of self-worth when compared to the domestic case. There are two responses to this argument. The first response is to highlight a problem with the empirical premise of the argument: whilst I think the general empirical assessment is broadly correct, i.e. it is true that people are more likely to compare themselves to those close to them and care about these comparisons in such a way that they are more likely to lose self-respect when they judge themselves inferior in these groups, what the argument would actually need to show in order to obviate the concern with cross-national equality is something stronger, to wit, it would need to show that no unjustified loss of self-respect presently occurs as a result of cross-border comparisons in which members of less well-off groups engage. And contrary to the plausible weaker empirical claim that the effects of cross-national comparison are *less* damaging than domestic ones, the claim that no damaging effects occur is unsustainable in a world characterised by extensive cross-border interaction, communication, commerce etc.¹⁶

But in any event –and this is the second response- it is not entirely clear what the normative status of this argument is meant to be, for it addresses only one of the possible answers we might give to the question why domestic social equality is valuable: whilst the phenomenon of non-comparing groups may help to reduce damages to self-respect amongst the worst-off domestically and internationally, protecting the self-respect amongst members of these groups is clearly not the only reason we have to care about social equality. Recall that the core intrinsic element of social equality is the idea that we can relate to others as equals, independent of class, gender, income and so forth. One important upshot of this ideal is that all persons – even those on top of the social hierarchy- suffer in some respect if a society is not one of social equals.¹⁷ A society that can protect the self-respect of the worst off only by being strictly organised into non-comparing groups, even where such groups are entered voluntarily, seems to fall quite short of this fraternal aspect of the egalitarian social ideal.

So even if the non-comparing group argument were empirically accurate, one cannot derive from it that social equality has no force in contexts beyond the state. Perhaps its significance relative to other concerns is weakened because one reason that speaks in favour of social equality (the fact that it instrumentally guarantees self-respect amongst persons) can be

¹⁶ Charles Beitz notes that “with the expansion and increased penetration of the global media, it cannot plausibly be held that global society is divided (...) into a plurality of non-comparing groups that are either unaware or indifferent to the standards of living found in other societies.” (Beitz 2001: 114) Also see the fuller discussion of cross national reference groups in the next section.

¹⁷ This point, namely that the better off are equally harmed in at least some respect in an unequal society is what might be called the ‘egalitarian-fraternal’ element of social equality. It is what Scanlon calls its “most egalitarian aspect” (Scanlon 2005: 15)

realised in different ways beyond the state. But that point by itself does not show that we lack reason to attempt to realise social equality. Miller is aware that one might focus on the more intrinsic and fraternal reasons to value social equality, but his response to that concern, it seems to me, is not fully convincing.¹⁸ It may well be correct that equal respect between political communities and the dramatic injustices that we currently see between states globally are much more pressing issues that must be addressed. But that is no reason to conclude that in those cases where persons from different states intensely interact in ways that are from their perspective permanent and largely unavoidable (i.e. in cases such as the EU), we have no reason to care about fraternal relations amongst persons who interact in these ways.

6.4.2 Feasibility arguments

Even if, as I just suggested, the moral arguments of the restrictivist position may not be fully convincing, should doubts about the feasibility to realise social equality beyond the state not be wholly sufficient to dispel the idea of extending social equality beyond the state? Although I think that concerns about feasibility point to some important insights, I want to suggest that no categorical distinction between domestic and transnational applications of the social egalitarian ideal is possible. In particular, and this is the key point of the following discussion, these feasibility constraints are much less acute in the EU case than they are globally.

6.4.2.1 *Complex equality, esteem and partially overlapping spheres*

At first blush, the absence of shared hierarchies of esteem –and ‘complex equality’ which may help to bring it about- is the one issue that requires the most cultural and sociological commonality amongst persons to be realistically feasible, for there need to be various social spheres of esteem in which people interact, and there needs to be some level of agreement concerning the importance of these spheres. Whilst I think this is largely correct, I want to propose that much less is in fact required for a form of *relational equality* to become feasible amongst members of a social group. The point is that whilst the existence of hierarchies of esteem poses a problem where people engage in comparison and competition across a range of social spheres, the *existence* of such spheres is not a pre-requisite for the value of relational equality to emerge as a possibility. All that is required for this form of equality is that they enjoy equal basic standing and equal power over the fundamental political terms of their interaction.

Of course, this assumption is compatible with the idea that *where there are* pronounced interactions across different spheres (as there is within domestic society), it *would be* problematic if some people systematically outperformed all others in each sphere or if one of these spheres

¹⁸ He says: “Once again, my response to the argument is somewhat sceptical. What international cooperation requires is indeed not fraternity, but mutual respect between political communities who recognize their differences but also realize that they need to work together in a number of policy areas. And the precondition for this is not equality, but the absence of serious injustice.” (Miller 2007: 78)

became a dominant marker of overall social standing. But if we think about examples where the social spheres in which individuals participate only partly overlap, then that fact itself establishes something like a 'structural incommensurability'. Perhaps it is easiest to see why this is so by reference to a simplified example: Imagine a federal arrangement between two societies. In society A, there are two social spheres with their own rankings, say sphere 1 and 2. The same is true for society B, where there are spheres 3 and 4. Now within each of these societies, complex equality will require that no group of persons outranks all other social groups in both these spheres and that none of these spheres is considered pre-eminent because only then will all members of A or B compared to the As and Bs be able to fall back on their common political status as equals in public interaction, provided that each person can secure a basic level of social respectability (see next section).

But now think of the complete federal arrangement consisting of all As and Bs and what relational equality will require there: again, it will be necessary that (a) people have a common political status as equals, that (b) they all enjoy equal basic standing and that (c) no spheres of social achievement is pre-eminent or no group outranks all others across these spheres. But in the federal collective of people, condition (c) is inevitably satisfied because the spheres of As and Bs are in fact separate, and there is therefore incommensurability between all spheres (1-4) considered at the federal level. So plausibly, the relevant point about complex equality and equality of status beyond the state is this: the fact that people engage in spheres of esteem that only partially overlap and potentially rank people according to different criteria within these spheres seems actually to make the realisation of equal status easier, rather than more difficult, so long as they maintain equal basic standing and equal power over their political institutions.

Nothing that I have said yet indicates that this kind of incommensurability does obtain amongst EU citizens living in separate states. Perhaps one way to make good on this claim is to refer back to the second section of chapter four where equality of opportunity amongst EU citizens was discussed. As I said there, the integration of European societies over the past decades has made it the case that certain positions of authority and advantage are the subject of competition from persons residing in all EU member states. Direct actual competition for desirable jobs plausibly implies that people at least to some extent *share* relevant hierarchies of esteem transnationally: If being a rich businessman or a successful athlete did not command similar positive assessments across European societies, then why would individuals compete for these positions in the first place? But nonetheless, it seems undeniable that many spheres of esteem remain limited to evaluations between members of the same society - so the EU is a social formation where variously overlapping sets of people compete in different spheres and assess their relevant position against persons who are sometimes only their co-nationals, sometimes belong to a wider group. So as far as the absence of hierarchies of esteem as a pre-requisite for relational equality in the sense of equal status is concerned, it seems that the EU case

inherently provides the absence of this kind of hierarchy because spheres of assessment are only partially overlapping. Of course, this does not show that social equality amongst EU citizens is therefore realised, for there may still be hierarchies of power and basic social standing in place between them.

6.4.2.2 Stigma and Humiliation

One egalitarian bad that social equality seeks to counteract is that of unequal basic standing, indicated by the fact that some people feel humiliated and stigmatized in the context of public interaction. An initially compelling thought is that the damaging effect of stigma and humiliation is a phenomenon that matters primarily amongst persons in their direct (interpersonal) relations and in face-to-face social contact with others. This would mean that threats of stigma and humiliation are always localized and require particular local institutional solutions. An additional problem with extending the argument against stigma and humiliation across societal contexts was, as we saw, that cultural differences may render the definition of when a set of material holdings is insufficient to guarantee basic social standing problematic when we look at groups that do not share a culture. Are these arguments convincing? Let us consider them in turn, starting with the requirement of proximity and actual interaction.

The first point concerning the inapplicability of stigma and humiliation across borders focused on the fact that the relevant harm only occurs when there is close contact and a public sphere amongst persons. Yet contrary to this suggestion, I now want to render plausible the idea that there can be and undoubtedly are justified feelings of humiliation that one can experience whether or not there is direct interaction in a public sphere between the well-off and the poor. Consider the following science fiction example, popularized in the 2013 blockbuster film 'Elysium': in this dystopia, a minute fraction of humanity lives on a luxurious 'space habitat' circling earth whilst the vast majority lives on the planet in destitution, primarily occupied with producing goods for the Elysians to purchase for the satisfaction of their expensive habits. There is no direct or public interaction between the two parts of humanity because all trade relations are processed via robots conducted from Elysium. The essential point of this scenario is that people living on earth clearly are justified to feel a form of humiliation: many of them feel powerless and worthless simply knowing about the kind of life people on Elysium enjoy and the kind of power they can exercise over people on earth. In a certain respect, the sense of worthlessness is in fact exacerbated rather than weakened by the fact that the Elysians can simply choose not to interact personally with the unfortunate majority. Moving to a less fanciful example, consider those living in a slum or favela in a developing country whose neighbourhood is in proximity of a 'gated community' of the affluent members of society. Is it really plausible that simply in virtue of there being no direct contact between these groups, there is no room for experiencing humiliation?

A more convincing account of humiliation's conditions of appropriateness, it seems to me, does not start from actual forms of physical interaction but from the mere fact of reciprocal

knowledge about each other and prevalent judgements and standards of reference that exist within and across social groups. The person raised in a Columbian favela (or a Romanian or Bulgarian Roma living in a rural slum) is perfectly justified in feeling shame and stigma once she realises that a majority –wherever they may reside– live in properly-constructed buildings with running water and clean sanitation, have more than one set of clothes to wear etc. and it is the case that this majority believes that living in those conditions in which the poor person lives would give them reason to feel ashamed and humiliated. And *these* conditions are surely met once there is intense global economic and social interaction. As Glyn Morgan observes:

As globalization increases our access to ways of life outside our own borders, it is likely that people's reference group will extend to those outside their own borders. It is not implausible to imagine a world where the general idea emerges of a representative modern lifestyle – a lifestyle that includes a car, a well-equipped house, and a functioning public infrastructure. To the extent that people measure their sense of self-worth in terms of this modern lifestyle, those deprived of this lifestyle might well think of themselves as the world's inferiors.¹⁹

Now how about the point that cultural differences preclude cross-national assessments of the material requirement of basic social standing? Whilst I think that points about cultural difference have some force when we think about what it would mean to extend the ideal of social equality globally, there is much less controversy regarding the requirements of basic respectability in more limited transnational contexts. For example, it seems quite possible to conceive of a cross-nationally valid definition of the minimal material requirements to be able to participate in public life as a person with standing if we limit ourselves to Europe and North America. Thus, whilst cultural differences may speak against the possibility of finding a global standard of humiliation-freeness, it is not so clear that cultural difference can bear the heavy burden of showing that we can never determine requirements of basic standing across national audiences.

6.5 Respectability, poverty and cross-country referencing in the EU

Despite their general plausibility, counter-arguments against the restrictivist position just proposed in the global context largely rely on conjecture: Whether and to what degree such a global standard about what constitutes a decent lifestyle has evolved will be subject to considerable empirical and theoretical disagreement. Similarly, whether individuals globally have extended their reference groups for assessments of self-respect and deprivation is difficult to assess.²⁰ Fortunately, the focus on the EU simplifies the question and allows me to scrutinize in more detail the actual empirical evidence for the emergence of cross-nationally valid

¹⁹ (Morgan 2011: 156)

²⁰ I have been unable to find any empirical studies that attempt to analyse this particular question in any detail.

respectability standards and the extension of people's reference groups (as far as basic material conditions of respectability are concerned) beyond the confines of their national community. In recent years, a number of sociologists and economists have turned to these questions in the context of EU-wide measurements of poverty and social exclusion.²¹

It is important to distinguish between two separate questions here: The first question concerns the actual content of each national standard of respectability, i.e. do people in each national context have roughly similar views about what level of material holdings is minimally required to be a member in good standing? If we can show this to be the case then at least the argument from cultural difference loses its plausibility as far as basic standing in the EU is concerned.²² The second question concerns the reference group according to which individuals define these requirements, to wit, do people feel humiliated in part because they actually compare their own holdings to those of individuals living in other societies (other EU member states)? Both these questions have been subjected to empirical analysis in the EU case, though the response to the former is for obvious reasons based on more solid survey data.²³

In the relevant empirical literature, the key concern is with the measurement of EU-wide poverty. It is therefore important to briefly describe the connection between the development of humiliation and stigma (and the lack of basic social standing) and the concept and measurement of poverty in this empirical literature.²⁴ There are different concepts of poverty and different approaches to its measurement. Only some of these are directly relevant for the issue of basic social standing. One fundamental distinction between different concepts of poverty is that between 'objective' and 'relative' poverty.²⁵ Objective accounts of poverty stipulate a level of resource holdings or access to goods (whether privately held or publically available) below which a person suffers an absolute shortfall in terms of basic human needs. Poverty of this subsistence kind is not obviously related to a lack of basic standing or stigmatisation. For example, Ci mentions the case of Maoist China where subsistence poverty was actually considered a 'proletarian virtue' and would not reduce social status.²⁶

Of course, subsistence poverty may be a strong indicator for the lack of social standing, but this will depend on further facts about the relevant society (e.g. in a society where everybody suffers from subsistence poverty, there is no lack of social standing for anybody who lacks adequate means). Since persons suffer humiliation and stigma when they are judged by others to fall short of some norm, it seems clear that certain accounts of 'relative' poverty are more

²¹ For a summary of this literature, see e.g. (Goedemé & Rottiers 2011)

²² Of course, it may still turn out that expectations and judgments about levels of resource holding that lead to *higher* status levels in social stratification differ above the basic minimum in accordance with cultural differences.

²³ See the discussion of the relevant data in (Dickes, Fusco, & Marlier 2010) and (Goedemé & Rottiers 2011)

²⁴ An illuminating discussion of the different 'stakes' of poverty that are morally relevant, see (Ci 2013). Classics in the field are (Sen 1983, 2006).

²⁵ See (Sen 1983)

²⁶ (Ci 2013: 126)

relevant for social standing. One classic approach here is the formulation by Townsend, who suggests that “individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged, or approved, in the societies to which they belong.”²⁷ Similar formulations have been adopted in many countries as the official definition of poverty, and indeed, the EU’s definition of poor individuals is that of “persons whose resources (material, cultural, social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State to which they belong.”²⁸

Yet when it comes to measuring poverty of this kind, there are again a number of possible approaches. One approach is that the researcher determines a relatively defined level of resources (most often approximated by income) below which it is then assumed that a person will count as poor relative to the stipulated reference group. The measure of poverty most widely used in empirical research is in fact a version of this kind: persons are judged to fall below the poverty-line if their income is lower than a certain percentage (frequently 60%) of the median national equivalized household income. Some scholars have criticised this approach because the methodology itself includes a bias towards national comparisons – but whether the relevant reference group should be national or transnational essentially depends on what purpose we want to use the statistical indicator *for*: as several authors in the EU context point out, it would be obviously questionable if EU institutions applied national-reference group indicators of poverty when contemplating how to distribute structural adjustment funds or resources from the European social fund. For example, the poverty threshold in the UK is about 3.5x higher in terms of available income (purchasing power adjusted!) than the poverty threshold in Poland, and so being poor in many richer EU member states still corresponds to levels of income (again, purchasing-power adjusted) that would put one well above the social median in many of the poorer states. So for the particular task of distribution EU resources, national poverty measurement seems not particularly well suited.²⁹

But the potential unfairness of such national-focused indicators is not the key concern here. A more important problem for the purpose of analysing social standing is the assumption that this level of income will track the amount of resources required to meet norms of respectability in the society where the person lives. Quite clearly, this assumption need not be true, for the resources to achieve a respectable status may be higher or lower than the arbitrarily

²⁷ (Townsend 1979: 31)

²⁸ (Council of the European Communities 1975)

²⁹ (Fahey 2007; Guio 2005a). Partly as a result of these kinds of criticisms, the EU has recently added further indicators to its statistical survey tools of EU citizens, which now includes the element of ‘degree of social deprivation’ from which a person suffers. This new indicator is measured in terms of access to crucial goods that all Europeans are assumed to consider essential for a decent lifestyle. (Atkinson & Marlier 2010)

set threshold of income, and anyway income may not be the best measure to start with.³⁰ A social indicator more relevant for the issue under consideration here is one where sociologists engage in ‘dual’ empirical studies, i.e. where they seek to determine not only how many people fall below some relatively defined level of income poverty (whether it is defined nationally or supra-nationally), but they also seek to establish through social surveys where people perceive this poverty level to lie. Evidently, what people in society take to be constitutive of poverty is going to be fundamental for the kind of stigma and humiliation that people may suffer.

6.5.1 Evidence of equal standards of respectability across the EU

A 2007 Eurobarometer research project and several research papers utilising this data have engaged in exactly such a kind of analysis.³¹ So for example, Dickes et.al. in their study on the “Structure of National Perceptions of Social Needs Across EU Countries” assess which items are considered to be ‘socially perceived necessities’ in different social contexts.³² The survey questions, posed to representative sampling groups in 27 EU member states were of the following kind: “What, in your view, is necessary for people to have what can be considered as an acceptable or decent standard of living in [your country]. For a person to have a decent standard of living in [your country], please tell me how necessary do you think it is to ...”³³ The 74 individual items that followed were separated into different ‘blocks’, covering financial situation, housing and local amenities, housing durables and communication devices, healthcare and other social services, nutrition and clothing, and social and leisure activities. A final block of items related specifically to the requirements of children. Respondents could specify whether they considered these items, “absolutely necessary, no one should have to do without”, “necessary”, “desirable but not necessary”, and “not at all necessary”.³⁴

Two key findings of the Eurobarometer study and Dickes et.al.’s analysis are, first, that there is remarkable similarity between the content of basic requirements to count as respectable across EU member states and, second, that the more necessary a particular items is considered within a national context, the more consensus there is across all European member states. Thus, there is near consensus (a correlation of the means scores >0.8) across European states when it comes to the necessity of basic healthcare, rudimentary secure financial situation (ability to pay utility bills/rent/mortgage), housing durables (bed, refrigerator), basic clothing (warm coat), medical equipment, housing and living conditions (no leaking roof, no damp walls, indoor

³⁰ For a discussion of the various reasons why income is at most a useful proxy of the relevant kind of poverty, see (Grusky & Kanbur 2006).

³¹ (European Commission 2007)

³² (Dickes, et al. 2010: 145). The methodological approach to socially perceived needs they follow is that of (Mack & Lansley 1985). The relevant dataset is that of the 2007 ‘Poverty and Exclusion’ Eurobarometer Survey. (European Commission 2007)

³³ (Dickes, et al. 2010: 147)

³⁴ (Dickes, et al. 2010: 147)

flushing toilet), and many items relating to children.³⁵ Similarly, Europeans generally share judgement about the kinds of items that are, although certainly important for a ‘good’ overall lifestyle, not strictly speaking necessary for a minimally decent life. These include for example the “capacity to save money each month, the ability to buy smart clothes for job interviews or other formal occasions, enough space in housing, quality of neighbourhood (...), social and leisure activities including decorating home, holidays, and (tele)communication (car, mobile phone, internet connection).”³⁶

One further noteworthy finding is this: whether or not a person in any EU country self-identifies as living in financially challenging circumstances is a stronger predictor of the set of items that she or he will identify as “absolutely necessary” than the EU member state in which she resides.³⁷ Thus, we should conclude that in respect of the first argument about cultural difference, standards of public respectability are roughly equivalent across most European states such that the question “Which kinds of material resources and capabilities are necessary to count as well-respected?” will receive identical or at least very similar responses in each member state.

6.5.2 Cross-national reference groups in the EU

Whilst these surveys show that cultural differences across EU member states are not very large, the findings mentioned do not show that people’s self-respect depends on cross-national comparisons (the second question identified above). For such an assessment, different research is necessary. Fortunately, such analyses also exist in the EU context. Thus, Delhey and Kohler in their pioneering 2006 study seek to establish whether citizens from European states rely on cross-national reference groups in determining their degree of life satisfaction and feeling of relative deprivation. The conclusion that these authors draw is that “just as people are assumed to have multiple identities, so they also use multiple yardsticks, both national and international.”³⁸ Although their study indicates that people predictably find it easier to compare their relative standing to neighbours, friends and co-nationals, roughly 90% of surveyed EU citizens are capable of forming cross-border assessments and they generally have a pretty accurate picture of actual differences between living standards prevailing in different European states (measured in terms of per capita GDP). More interesting for our purposes here, the authors conclude that “the lower individuals rate their own personal living conditions compared with those in the relevant reference country, the less content people are with their lives (...). Comparisons with rich countries have a greater influence than comparisons with poor countries. The more people feel personally deprived, relative to other countries, the less satisfied they are with their lives. In

³⁵ (Dickes, et al. 2010: 148-49)

³⁶ (Dickes, et al. 2010: 149)

³⁷ (European Commission 2007)

³⁸ (Delhey & Kohler 2006: 137)

contrast, the feeling of relative gratification has a much smaller impact on life satisfaction, and often no impact at all.”^{39,40}

Of course, none of this suggests that co-national comparisons do not continue to constitute the core frame of reference for assessments of deprivation, poverty and so forth. But as the study suggests, such assessments increasingly intermingle and combine with cross-national ones. Moreover, various authors suggest that two factors make it very likely that these cross-national reference group extensions are likely to grow stronger: First, the impact of cross-national comparisons on individual assessments has been shown to increase with the knowledge about living standards in other states, and knowledge of this kind of is much more likely to disperse as member state markets and mass media outlets are increasingly integrated in the EU. Second, the relative gap in living standards between states has been shown to increase the salience of cross-national reference groups. Since even the most recent studies do not include full statistical datasets for the newly acceded Central and Eastern European states (and do not yet include the growing gap between Southern and Northern member states’ standards of living in the wake of the global financial crisis), it is to be expected that future studies will reveal an even stronger influence of cross-national comparison.

To sum up: Evidence suggests that there is a fairly strong case for paying attention to cross-national material inequality if we aim to protect worse-off members in poorer EU member states from feelings of relative deprivation, stigma and loss of self-respect: the larger the cross-national poverty gap, and the more readily available information about the vast material differences are, the more negative the influence.

6.5.3 Equal Power and EU Institutions

The argument against the feasibility of equal power beyond the state was that it is not at all clear what kinds of decisions and rules should be subject to the requirement of equal power. I think this argument has considerable force as far as the global context is concerned. But does it have equal merit in its application to the more limited case of the EU? Contrary to the global case where it is hard to see what ‘equal control’ over the continuation and content of the social interaction would entail, the EU does have a clear legal framework that provides guidance as to the kinds of decisions that concern EU citizens as a group: not only do EU treaties specify which areas of political decision-making fall within the competency of supranational authority, but the European legal system also has norms governing which issues fall exclusively within the domain of member states as well as interpretative principles (“subsidiarity”) and decision-making

³⁹ (Delhey & Kohler 2006: 137)

⁴⁰ Jonathan White has presented an interesting qualitative analysis on the degree to which Europeans engage in cross-national comparisons. He shows how “by generating diverse social encounters, new information resources, and an extension in the scope of legislation, [the EU] invites citizens to compare their daily experiences with those of people further afield and to evoke reference groups outside their country of residence.” (White 2012: 61)

procedures to determine which decisions are properly part of EU authority in case of conflicts about competency between different levels of governance. So whilst the argument that the proper scope and boundaries of the political ‘relationship’ in which we stand to all other persons globally appears difficult to answer and there is no obvious strategy on how to deal with this problem, the EU as an institutionally embodied entity can plausibly determine which issues fall within the scope of the ‘co-EU citizen relationships’ in ways that are comparative to those in which contemporary nation states deal with such questions.

Furthermore, it seems that this point is strengthened by recent EU treaty developments and in particular the formation of a charter of EU ‘citizenship’ rights that concretize the set of equal rights that all EU citizens enjoy vis-à-vis EU institutions. The initial set of EU citizen rights developed from the economic rights of workers contained in the EEC Treaty, most notably Art. 40 and Art. 51 (EEC). These economic rights did not extend to anything approximating a set of equal political rights for direct participation in the EU as a supranational political order. But spurred by important decision of the ECJ regarding the implication of such economic rights against non-discrimination in ‘adjacent’ policy areas (e.g. inclusion in the social security schemes of foreign member states and the right to bring family members when working in other member states), there gradually developed a core set of equal rights that all persons in the EU enjoyed qua being citizens of one of the EU’s member states. The Maastricht treaty generalized these predominantly economic rights but also extended them into more ‘political’ and ‘participatory’ domains. Thus, the Maastricht treaty contains Articles 17-22 on *European citizenship*.

More recently, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union –part of the Lisbon treaty- has further enhanced the level of political and procedural ‘citizen rights’ of all EU nationals. Although the EU citizenship provisions only have direct effect on the decisions of EU institutions and member states in relation to the implementation of EU legislation, the EU citizenship rights sometimes have quite far-reaching implications. For example, the EU Commission has recently issued guidelines for member states to address issues of domestic democratic participation for nationals living abroad on the basis that excluding citizens who live in another member state from national elections impinges on the substance of the *EU citizen right* to free movement. It seems then that in the EU case, contrary to the global one, there is a fairly concrete and institutionalized conception of the kinds of issues that concern EU citizens as a collective; and there is a set of basic political rights that grants a form of equal power over the institutions of the EU to each.

Summarizing the various points of section 6.5 then, my suggestion here has been that social and institutional features of the EU make it the case that on the one hand, some of the reasons to favour social equality that do not apply in the global case do seem to have force when transferred to the EU case, and, on the other hand, some of the feasibility problems that restrictivist critics have pointed out in relation to the global case can be set aside when we think

about relational equality in the EU. Thus, I conclude that at least some core elements of social equality as I have defended in chapter two apply to the EU and make ‘EU social equality’ a valuable and feasible ideal.

6.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to convince readers that indirect transnational arguments for economic justice at the EU level are plausible. I suggested that once we disaggregate the ideal of transnational solidarity (understood as a form of relational equality amongst EU citizens) and focus on different inegalitarian bads that the ideal seeks to avoid, we can see that at least a significant number of these inegalitarian bads may arise amongst EU citizens considered as the relevant social group. To point out the plausibility of these claims, I compared and contrasted the relationship in which EU citizens stand to one another with the conditions that characterise the relations amongst individual persons on a global scale more generally, and I demonstrated that at least some of the problems that the realisation of the ideal of social equality on a global scale would entail do not arise in this more limited context: there is less cultural diversity amongst Europeans, and their heavy interaction has to some extent led to cross-national comparisons in which persons engage when reflecting on their basic social status and level of deprivation.

Moreover, EU citizens already have in place a set of political institutions and quasi-constitutional principles that offer them a fundamental public status as participants with equal political and procedural rights in the decisions of EU institutions. These institutions and principles may be less extensive than equal citizenship in democratic states, but they do act as a public form of recognition that EU citizens are in some fundamental way equal participants with equally valid claims to decision-making power and social standing in the EU. No institutionally guaranteed transnational set of political and procedural rights exists globally, and hence realising anything approximating the ideal of social equality on that level will face more severe difficulties.

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